

# Daughters of the Digital Empire

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Book One of  
Moonlight Hearts

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By D.D. Ward

And Margaret Lovelace

## Content Warnings

### **Sexual content**

- 0 none.
- 1 kissing and romance
- 2 heavy petting, implied sex
- 4 explicit sexual content
- 5 non consensual content

### **Violent content**

- 0 none.

- 1 action with no death seen
- 2 violence with no blood or gore
- 4 extreme violence, explicit gore
- 5 sexual assault

## List of Trigger Warnings

Sexual assault

**Abuse ✓**

Child abuse/pedophilia/incest

Animal cruelty or animal death

**Self-harm and suicide ✓**

Eating disorders, body hatred, and fat phobia

**Violence ✓**

Pornographic content

**Kidnapping and abduction ✓**

**Death or dying ✓**

Pregnancy/childbirth

Miscarriages/abortion

**Blood ✓**

Mental illness

Ableism

Racism and racial slurs

**Sexism and misogyny ✓**

**Classism ✓**

Hateful language directed at religious groups

Transphobia and trans misogyny

Homophobia and heterosexism

**Swears or curses ✓**

**Nudity ✓**

**Murder ✓**

Torture

## Chapter 5: The Heroine

I noticed the butler, Manfred, standing at the top of the grand staircase. He wore his black waist coat and short dinner coat.

Morning sunlight poured through the massive windows of the hall.

Silver wisps from Manfred's receding hairline drifted in the light.

"Presenting the Lady Carolynn Octavian."

I stiffened and almost dropped my wine glass. Did that mean what I thought it meant? It had to. The heroine didn't have a name, neither did the rival. The player entered both names when they started the game.

I only knew one Carolynn. And she'd named the rival after me last night, and the heroine after herself.

And then there she stood at the top of the grand staircase, my best friend since kindergarten: Lynn. She was wearing an A-line powder blue ball gown. The outfit was a good deal more ornate than mine, and more formal as well. The dress had a built-in swan bill corset. It didn't look comfortable- but did look spectacular. She was looking to make an impression. Assuming she had picked the dress. I hadn't picked mine, after all. Somebody had pulled up and pinned Lynn's platinum hair. She had her hair in an elaborate chignon waterfall of curls. She was wearing cluster style earrings with aquamarine and moonstones set in gold. She wore a moonstone necklace designed to look like two crossed hyssop flowers. Finally on her right arm she wore a gemstone bracelet, made from thin braids of silver and gold. On the bracelet the jeweler had mounted five aquamarine stones. The whole look seemed to me as though somebody designed it to scream: 'I'm classy.' It was working.

Lynn looked different as she stood at the top of the staircase. I had recognized her as my friend, but she looked different in a myriad of tiny ways I couldn't nail down. She looked like an idealized version of herself. It was breathtaking and eerie in equal measures. I suspected that she looked normal to everyone else. But looking at an upgraded version of my best friend was unsettling. As I watched, Lynn began her slow descent of the staircase.

As I stared, Amy approached with a drinks tray.

"Lady Ren, would you like a drink?" Amy said. And then she whispered, "You're staring again."

I nodded, "Red wine please."

Then I whispered back, "She's looking to put on a show, isn't she?"

Amy nodded as she handed me a goblet. I took it with a whispered thank you and she moved on.

Amy passed another maid and stopped, "Helen, pass me those empty glasses. I'll take them back to the kitchen. You can take my

full glasses.”

The other maid, Helen, nodded and then exchanged items. I turned back to the stairs. Lynn reached the bottom of the staircase and stood beside me. I smelled hyacinth perfume. And at that point I realized that I hadn’t introduced myself to the suitors.

Lynn looked at me and smiled a slight smile. I cocked my head and considered the smile. Was Lynn feeling smug? Was she mocking me? Why would she do that? And then I remembered that although she looked like herself, I looked like the rival. The player customized the heroine’s appearance. But the rival had no customizing option for her appearance. I looked the same as the rival did in every playthrough. Lynn was probably thinking about her knowledge of the game, and feeling smug about her chances at outwitting the rival.

Lynn took a glass of wine from Amy and turned back to me. “Cheers Lady Karen,” she said.

I smiled and clinked her glass with my own, “Cheers Lynn. And please, call me Ren.”

Lynn paused, glass halfway to her mouth.

“Ren? Call you Ren?”

Ren was not a common name, nor was it a common shortening of Karen. She suspected who I was, which had been my intent. I looked around. The suitors hadn’t approached yet, and Amy had moved on.

I nodded, “Yes. And yes. It’s amazing what a thunderstorm will do to a computer game, isn’t it?”

She blinked. “You don’t look like you,” she said.

“You can’t customize the rival’s appearance. The player can only change the heroine’s appearance.”

“So, you’re stuck like that? I mean, that’s not a problem, I suppose. You look like a supermodel.”

“I assume I’m stuck. How would I change it? But I’m still getting my feet under me. Do you think we’re dead?”

“I don’t know, but this feels real. I pinched myself to check,” she said.

I smiled, “So did I. My maid had a fit when I drew blood. So here we are. In your favorite game ever. Well, I promise you I’m not going to be the rival. I will have your back. I will protect you.”

Lynn smiled, “Thank you. I appreciate that.”

“Of course. I’m your best friend. I’m loyal to my friends.”

“Yeah, it’s you alright,” Lynn said. “Did you ever wonder, what loyalty really is?”

"It means I've got your back. It means I'll protect you against anyone who threatens you."

"That's a lot, Ren. It's always been a lot. But I appreciate it." Lynn paused. "This is all overwhelming, isn't it. I wasn't sure if this was a dream or a hallucination. But with you here, I'm starting to think that it might be real."

"Real as opposed to what?"

"As opposed to us being in the game." Lynn answered.

"Why couldn't it be real and the game?" I asked.

I guess," Lynn paused. "I just hadn't considered the game world as real. But I suppose if we're stuck here, it might as well be.

Lynn turned away for a moment. I could tell she was getting her thoughts in order, trying to decide what she wanted to say. So I waited.

When she turned back, she said, "Has it felt to you like something supercharged your emotions? Or is that me?"

I thought about this and my experience with Amy. "I'm not sure. Maybe. Why ask?"

"I don't know. I'm wondering if that's part of the game. Maybe the game wants drama."

"Well, I have felt more dramatic lately." I admitted. "Bolder. So maybe. But why does it matter if this is real or a game?"

"Ren, I don't know how we got here," Lynn said. "Maybe we are in the game. Or maybe we did die. I don't know. And I don't know how we get home, or if we even can get home.

"There won't be a lot of people to miss us, at least." I said.

"Yeah," Lynn said, "The girls in the dorm and my stepmom.

"Either way," I said, "we should assume that we aren't going home. Which means we have to play the game."

Lynn grinned "And I know this world better than anybody save the designers. So, if I'm stuck here, then I'm going to make this work. End of story."

"That's the spirit." I said.